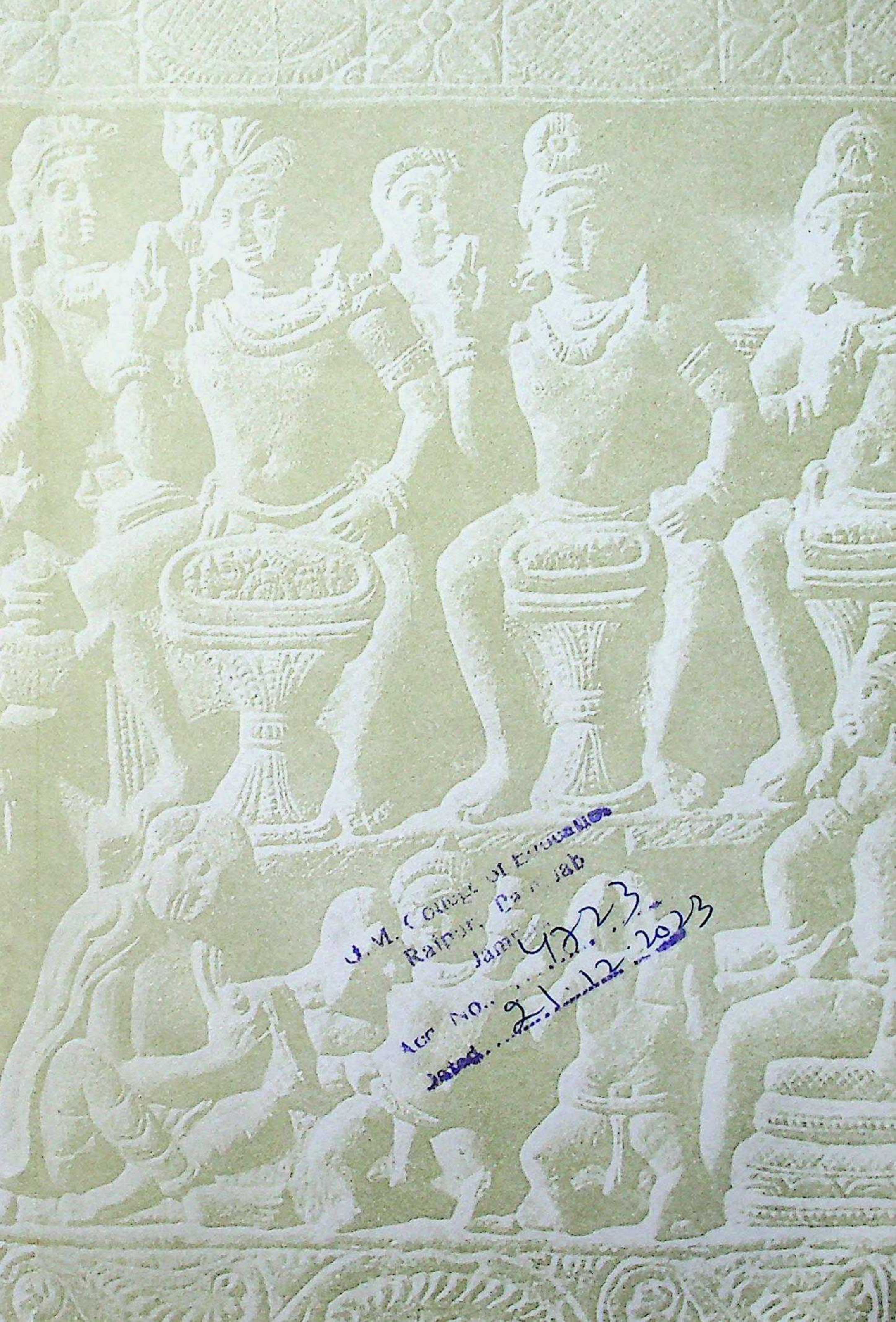
Sahitya Akademi Award-winning Urdu Poetry Collection

Pencil and Other Poems

Jayant Parmar

Translated from the Urdu

Nishat Zaidi



J.M. College of Education
Raipur, [illegible]
Jammu
Acc No. 4223
Dated 21.12.2023

Pencil and Other Poems

For
Agnishikhar
with love
JAYANTI
17/6/22
Shimla

अग्निशेखर और क्षमा कौल
द्वारा यह
पुस्तक सप्रेम भेंट

for

Agnashukla

with love

11/6/02

The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodhana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From: Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.

Courtesy: National Museum, New Delhi

Sahitya Akademi Award-winning Urdu Poetry Collection

Pencil and Other Poems

Jayant Parmar

Translated from the Urdu

Nishat Zaidi

Sahitya Akademi

Pencil and Other Poems: English translation of Jayant Parmar's Akademi award-winning Urdu poetry collection *Pencil aur Doosari Nazmein* by Nishat Zaidi. Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi (2016), ₹150/-

Sahitya Akademi

Head Office
Rabindra Bhawan, 35, Ferozeshah Road, New Delhi 110 001
Website : http://www.sahitya-akademi.gov.in

Sales Office
Swati, Mandir Marg, New Delhi 110 001
E-mail : ds.sales@sahitya-akademi.gov.in

Regional Offices
172, Mumbai Marathi Grantha Sangrahalaya Marg, Dadar,
Mumbai 400 014

Central College Campus, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Veedhi,
Bangalore 560 001

4 D L Khan Road, Kolkata 700 025

Chennai Office
Main Guna Building Complex (second floor) 443(304),
Anna Salai, Teynampet, Chennai 600 018

© Sahitya Akademi

First Published: 2014
Reprinted: 2016

ISBN: 978-81-260-4330-9

Rs. 150/-

Printed at Sita Fine Arts Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi.

Contents

Translator's Introduction Nishat Zaidi 9
Forword : Word-Poems on the Easel Gopi Chand Narang 13
Forword Balraj Komal 29

Foreword 37
Ghalib 38
I am Sure... 39
I am born again and again in Poems 40
For Shamsur Rahman Faruqi 42
Pencil - I 45
Pencil - II 46
Pencil - III 47
Ghazal 49
Paper - I 50
Paper - II 51
The Pen-friendly Paper 52
Ghazal 53
I have seen him Many Times on the Easel! 54
Sunflowers 55
The Black Bird of Sorrow 56
Crows over the Corn Field 57
Ram Kumar's Paintings 58
A Poem of Pale Sadness 61
Ghazal 62

Drawing 63
Painting 64
Art Gallery 65
Marina Tsvetayeva-I 67
Marina Tsvetayeva-II 68
I Have Seen Paz 69
Ghazal 70
Death 73
The Day of Death 75
Death, an Experience 76
Blackboard 77
Miraji's Picture 78
Ghazal 79
For the Dalit 80
Mother 81
The Stench of the Hell-Pit 82
Mother's Worry 83
My Numb Fingers do not have the Strength 84
A Thousand Hands 87
The Will of a Dalit Poet 89
Ghazal 91
Panthers 92
O Morning Breeze! 93
Shoes 95
Ghazal 96
The Tomb of Faiyaz Khan 97
That which was better 98
The City 99
March Second 100
Dark Ghazal-I 101

Dark Ghazal-II 102
A Morning in Darjeeling 103
Toy Train 104
On the Way to Gangtok 105
Mani Karan 106
Africa 109
Ghazal 110
Words are Beautiful 111
He Smells the Graves of His Ancestors 113
Ghazal 114
Ink Breaths in His Navel 115
In My Eyes 119
It's going to be Night 120
For Kumar Pashi 121
The Painting of an Evening -I 122
The Painting of an Evening - 2 123
Your Name 124
Ghazal 125
A Lane turns from There 126
Preserved Only in the Album 127
Void 128
Come, My Love 129
Ghazal 130
Dream -1 131
Dream - 2 132
A Wish 133
Rain 134
Ghazal 135
Paralysis 136
The Bear 138

A Poem 140
Ghazal 142
Where have I Kept the Poem? 143
The Weary Sun 144
Collage 145
Ghazal 146
O Sea, O Sea - 1 147
O Sea, O Sea - 2 148
O Sea, O Sea - 3 149
O Sea, O Sea - 4 150
Ghazal 151
Surreal Dreams 152
The Kiss 153
Memory 154
Ghazal 155
An Afternoon Painting 156
To the Comb 159
Ghazal 160

Translator's Introduction

By

Nishat Zaidi

Good poetry is born out of tensions, believed W.B. Yeats. While the ideals that the poets nurture dictate their thematic choices, any art, ultimately, must rise above the propaganda and create beauty, which transcends limits of the manifest. Unfortunately, much of the critical writings on Jayant Parmar approach his poetry from rather narrow perspectives of him being a Dalit poet, an artist poet, a calligrapher and so on. In his case, it is more like picking low-hanging fruits and pigeonholing a bard whose verse in fact proves him to be a true poet. Jayant Parmar's poetry, as I have experienced it, achieves this by adhering to the aesthetic imperatives of poetry, notwithstanding his overt espousal of social causes. Even as 'Dalitism' continues to be a crucial concern in Jayant's poetry, unlike other Dalit writers Jayant refuses to surrender art and aesthetics to the dictates of 'praxis'. By his sheer commitment and sincerity to his craft, labour and immense talent Jayant Parmar is one of the best among the poets of his generation and indeed a highbrow poet of Urdu.

Born in a Dalit family, to an illiterate mother and a factory worker father who had never been to school, Jayant Parmar learnt to face the vagaries of life at an early age. He was all of fourteen when he started to earn livelihood by drawing portraits and working for a frame seller. Soon miniature painting became his profession. At thirty, Jayant Parmar, who lived in a Muslim majority locality, decided to learn Urdu language and literature. Soon enough, he succeeded in mastering the art and craft of Urdu poetry. He has also laid his hand at Urdu calligraphy.

That he profited from his unique background, near mastery over the language he made himself learn and chose to write in, as well as the times he lived and lives in is perhaps only a splendid coincidence.[1] He seems to have not only read the writing on the wall but also skilfully and passionately adorned the wall with his own creative outpourings with a rare matter-of-fact diction. Symbols, metaphors and images in Jayant Parmar's poems, more often than not, follow their own internal dynamics, apart from their representational value. The dialectical structures, which thus emerge, produce an everlasting impact on the minds of readers, who are forced to go over them again and again to get to the bottom of meaning hidden in the maze of images.

Jayant Parmar's poetry delineates emotions which are personal, experiences which are private and concerns which are social, but he transforms it all into a work of art where multiple mediums combine and coalesce. He uses words like colours to create symphonies. At the same time, traditional idioms of Urdu poetry are seldom abandoned; thus, images of loss, loneliness, butterflies, leopards, bears, flowers, fragrance, moon and stars, rain and rivers, hills and deserts recur in the pages of Jayant Parmar's poetry as frequently as anywhere else in Urdu poetry. These, however, are transformed into new metaphors, new symbols and bearers of new meanings. Though primarily in free verse, the tonal quality and musicality is never compromised in these poems. Ghazals, though fewer in number, leave their own strong impression on the reader. All this makes the translator's job a challenging one whereby she/he is made to get to the bottom of aesthetic experience and unearth the subterranean vibes that float underneath the surface of the overt message of the poem.

---

[1] A bilingual poet, Jayant Parmar has published equally extensively in Gujarati. His Gujarati poems vocally express his Dalit concerns. But, Urdu, he claims, is his first love. He has written both Nazms and Ghazals in Urdu. He published his first anthology in Urdu in 1999 titled 'Aur'. Jayant Parmar has been honoured with the Gujarat Urdu Akademi Award (2001), Kumar Pashi Award (2001). His second anthology *Pencil Aur Doosri Nazmein* (2006) won him the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in 2009. Jayant Parmar has published two more anthologies after this collection. His third collection *Manind* was published in 2007, followed by *Antaral* in 2010.

●

Nazms lend themselves easily to translation due to their proximity to the formal structure of prose-poems. On the contrary, one has to admit that the *qafia-radif* bound ghazal form poses challenges before a translator which are generally insurmountable. I, too, have tried to work my way around them, at times trying to retain the refrain, at others, being forced to sacrifice them. My endeavour, while translating ghazals has been to capture the mood and effect rather than the denotative meaning as I believe that the referential meaning in poetry in general, and in ghazal in particular, is always subsumed to the connotative meaning.

As a translator whose voyage into Jayant Parmar's poetic world took her to many worlds, lands and texts, I can only wish that, in the times to come, he will be read with much more care and nuance as a talented, serious and high-calibre Urdu poet. That he continues to be prolific should provide his readers and critics with a greater opportunity and a much larger body of work and 'words' to reflect on and locate him as a poet. Nevertheless, his brilliant work thus far certainly kindles a desire to ask for more.

I am grateful to Jayant Parmar for his encouragement and support. My thanks are due to Professor Gopi Chand Narang who has always been supportive of my translation endeavours. To Ammi, Nafay, Alizia and Mojiz, I owe more than I can express in words.

Foreword

Word-Poems on the Easel

by

Gopi Chand Narang

Poetry is a multifaceted art. Just as beauty attracts in a variety of ways, poetry also is a bag of secrets with its own charm. Although literary criticism unravels the mysteries of poetry—and the real appreciation is nothing but a reading that recreates the creative process and explores its meaning—but unravelling all the secrets, despite claims by critics, is beyond any kind of criticism. Critics who make such claims, perhaps, are not mindful of their own feet of clay. If, while reading or hearing, poetry captures the imagination, leaves an impression, recalls an experience or produces a wave of memory of the past or opens a window of hidden secrets, then it in a way uses aesthetic beauty, which is known as Aesthetic act or medium in literary criticism. Words by themselves are words but they become charged with wonder when imbued with the spark of innovative meaning and impact. It is not a mechanical process, the creative process is an integrated whole where the warp cannot be separated from the woof whereby the text is transformed into a mystical experience.

Every poet makes his own aesthetic choices and of all the aesthetic choices available he has authority over only a few, which are consistent with his own disposition and mental construct. Great poets use complex superior designs, which not everyone can master. But, if a poet can be recognized by his individual style, tone and temper, however limited they might be, and can establish meaning and leave an impression on the mind of his readers then he is worth appreciating and has provided enough justification for his poetry.

Creating images is an important act in the creative process. Different theorists have assigned it different levels of significance, yet no one has denied the role of imagery in the creative process. It is a medium that connects poetry with art and painting. Image and colour, central to art, are in themselves extremely ambiguous and vast in the possibilities of interpretation. Every observer is free to interpret in his own way and derive his own meaning from it. Poetic language too is not free from ambiguity because meaning is established by difference. In other words, there are as many concrete meanings as abstract. The primary layer of language, where the meaning is normally established, thus, is literal and convention-bound. Hence, compared to art and painting, language follows a different creative process, despite staying within the linguistic and cultural paradigm. But poetry where imagery is exercised as a dominant medium turns into art and vice versa, which means that *nazms* create paintings and paintings embody the element of poetry. The distinction of Jayant Parmar lies in the fact that he is the only poet of Urdu whose poetic creations are imbued with the creative process of art. There might be others but no one has such a skilful and effective combination. Let us examine his nazm 'Where Have I Kept the Poem' and find out what he is searching in the nazm:

In the drawers of my desk,
over the table,
on the rack, in the cupboard,
on the book shelf—
                    I have been searching for it for so long,
in frenzy,
through the pages of my old books,
                    in the torn pockets
                    of my khaddar kurta,
in my camel- leather bag.
Where have I kept the poem?
Then I ask,

Neruda, Amichai, Rilke;
I just kept it somewhere.

As I search for the poem, I find
pen, ink and blank papers.
But the poem
is missing
from the notebook of my heart.

This unravels the way the poet creates a poem. One cannot make or construct a poem unless the fountain of creativity is flowing within. A poem also does not come by following the models of other poets. Also, it cannot be written by referring to old books or papers in a bag or in the drawers of a desk. It was here a moment ago and has suddenly disappeared. That is, you cannot consciously create a moment of creativity. It is not a conscious process. The following poem further clarifies the point:

Just a moment ago, her breasts
glowed on the silken canvas of her blue bra.
In the dark lanes of navel, over the green grass
climb the ants of desire;
going up the slopes of breasts,
the footprints of frenzy,
slide into a deep ditch!
Lounging on the couch of lips
the butterflies of lust;
the waves of blood clinging to the moon;
the yellow sun,
drying wet clothes on tall coconut trees;
from the leaf of eye-lashes
descended a scarlet star,
sinking thereafter
in the waters of darkness;
the nude evening,
lying on the sand
was kissing her warm calves;

the colourful fishes of thighs
longing to flee.
My dreams, all flighty!

In art, the subliminal elements of creative process easily mingle with the surreal, subconscious roots. The poem progresses image by image and finally turns itself into a bigger visual image by the dynamic and vivid act of picture making. The picture is ripe with the images of subconscious dreams of sexual desire such as woman's breast, the silken canvas of blue bra, the dark labyrinth of naval, the ant of lust climbing the green grass—every line in the poem evokes an image in the mind. The footprints of frenzy, / slide into a deep trench / wet clothes / kissing warm calves / the nude evening lying on the sand: these images defining the surreal dream mark Jayant Parmar's poetic world where words disappear as you read, and on the screen of your mind. shines a vivid picture and a complex colourful image.

Look at the following poem 'Your Name'. The theme of the poem is vague but image-making seems to bring alive every petal of flower and the name, like fragrance, spreads all around us:

Your Name

I write your name,
with my fingers,
on each petal of the flower.
The flower withers away.
But your name,
becomes fragrance,
spreads all around.

The present collection has three poems in the 'pencil series' and all of them are different from each other. Pencil, which draws images, is a source of creativity in the hands of an artist like words for a poet. Let's see in the following poem how the word turns into the sharp tip of a pencil, drawing an image:

The girl in the blue jeans,
sitting on the bench
sharpens her pencil
and out comes from it
a black flower.

The pencil writes
black letters
like the black butterflies
on a blank paper.

The pencil writes
white letters,
like the sun, moon and stars,
on the canvas of the sky.

The pencil writes
golden wings
on the arms of the universe,
like the dreams of the girl.

The girl in blue jeans sharpens her pencil and a black flower comes out from it. What does this black flower symbolise, which leads to one image after another? Blank paper / black letters / like black butterflies, or, white letters / on the canvas of the sky. The image-making reaches its culmination when these letters writing golden wings / on the arms of the universe / like the dreams of the girl. This is how the cycle of image within image completes and the images emerging from the black flower, in all their glittering colours, start shining on the canvas of our mind.

There are many poems, which appear scenic in nature such as 'A Morning in Darjeeling', 'Toy Train', 'On Way to Gangtok', 'Mani Karan', 'The Painting of an Evening-I', 'The Painting of an Evening-II'. But Jayant Parmar's poetry is not only pictorial. These picture poems also have a variety of meanings. Sex lurks deep in the subconscious, but there are all kinds of pain residing in the hidden vaults of psyche that surface in the image-poems of

Jayant Parmar. The poet talks about the creative void, which means there are moments when he is afraid of his own self. For example, "in the loneliness of the night, / in the mirror / I rest my head, /on my own shoulders, /and cry for many hours." But it is not as if the *nazms* of Jayant Parmar do not stare from the subconscious at the outside world. These poems also dwell on human and social relationships. Indeed, charity should begin at home. Jayant Parmar has lived through the bloody scenes of Ahmadabad. See how external events get transformed into a spiritual experience and shape into an aesthetic expression. The title of the poem is 'The City' :

The City

In a flash
it fell into the river of blood
Dragging itself on its palms
it barely got up
Its forehead and temples
still bleeding
one hand
hanging from a sling
one leg wounded by the gunshot
With great difficulty
with the help of crutches
it straightens its back
and tries to stand up.

In another poem, 'March Second', the poet does not indicate the year in the title. See how, on the dismantling of Wali's revered grave, the poet paints the bright forehead of the city with the black letters:

March second
Your resplendent forehead
was tainted black.

Wali!
You had once sowed an innocent heart
in some anonymous corner
of this land.
You used to tell me with pride
'I am a Gujarati.'
But your own city
has razed every single brick
of your grave.

My city too
has wilted away
flowers of devotion.
My love
You are soaked in blood
I, too, am soaked in blood!

March second
Your resplendent forehead
was tainted black.

Jayant Parmar has also composed 'Dark ghazals for the city of Ahmadabad'. See how pictorial the couplets of these galzals are, and how the pain and teardrops transform into words —

Wait, let me also lend my shoulder
This is my city's funeral procession.

That which burnt away in the fire
Was the flower of green affinity.

Who could I call for help, who
Who was there in the vicinity?

True, it dwelled inside me—
the man, who was so beastly.

Happy it was, to burn a house—
It was indeed my own city.

Now that the discussion has turned to ghazals, it is opportune to inform the readers that poet has adorned the space of his *nazms* with bouquets of ghazals. Here too, bright and dim colours, things and pictures have the same effect as they have in his *nazms*—only the canvas of ghazals is relatively smaller though the effect is equally sharp. In these couplets, colours should also be allowed to enter the heart :

Pale, wilted, withered flower
On boughs, here and there
a flower.

All figures are faded—
The moon, the stars
the face and the flower.

Lanes, offices
rooms and squares—
inside, outside
scattered, the flower.

In each body
every speck of dust
Truth— the fragrance
Lie— the flower.

The doors await the pathways
In the evening
smoulders the heart—
a flower.

The bright backyard
the sun smiling ever
descending in every window—

a flower.

Let none suffer such fate, my God!
when even during the spring time
the branches are devoid of rose.

The day will come, I know
when eyes will be devoid of compassion
hands devoid of books.

The couplets are often dynamic in nature and leave an impression on the sensitive mind. Words or relationships are indeed green, blue, yellow, white, black but more than that the moon, book, flower, mirage, rose, rivers of slumber, and islands of dreams lead to images within images. Sometimes a little slack treatment of language adrift from the regular usage or slight modification changes the usual flavour of the ghazal. See how, by mixing of the plural form with the old Urdu *radeef*, a new effect has been produced in the following ghazal:

Who appears in my dream
In mirage the flowers gleam.

They shone bright in darkness—
Inside the book, all words green.

They drowned in the river of sleep
Islands that inhabited my dream.

The moon sleeps in the midst of rose
Open your window to admire the scene.

Another aspect of this collection is that it has many poems dedicated to individuals. This trend is commonly found in the works of Neruda, Paz and many other poets. This is even more prevalent in Bengali, Hindi and Gujarati. Although Jayant Parmar has dedicated many nazms to his contemporaries, but this is not as significant as the ones written for a few peerless personalities of the past. Chief among them are Van Gogh ('Sunflower', 'The Blackbird of Sorrow', 'Crows over Cornfield'), 'Paintings of Ram Kumar', 'A Poem of Pale Sadness' (Amrita Shergill), Gauguin, Swaminathan, Salvador Dali, Marina Tsvetayeva (Russian female poet), Octavio Paz, Miraji and Ustad Faiyaz Khan. As is known, Paz was the Mexican Ambassador to India for very long time. His creative ideas were deeply influenced by Indian philosophy and thoughts. Paz acknowledged this fact in many of his poems and wrote numerous poems on people and places of India. See Jayant's tribute to him:

I have Seen Paz

I saw Paz
at the tomb of Amir Khusrau
in the pale shade of the evening
under the dome of words and music
between Nizamuddin Aulia, a mendicant
and Amir Khusrau
Sleeping under the arches
of poems—
I have seen Paz.

This picture of Miraji is also worth reading:

Miraji's Portrait

A turban on his head
large ear-rings in ears
a bead necklace around the neck
in his arm, an amulet—
wandering around the world
knocking at the door
in the city of words:
A darvesh.

Painting and poetry are his rightful domains but word-poems of music also shoot from the moist soil of Jayant's psyche. Notice the scene of severed, broken and semi-charred notes on the tomb of Faiyaz Khan and the impression it creates on one's mind:

The Tomb of Faiyaz Khan

The marble tombstone
of Faiyaz Khan
bends over the heap of his ruined grave
searching—
for *sa-re-ga-ma-pa-dha-ni...*
for *abir* and *gulal* bowing in devotion
for the moist melody of *Raga Malkos*
for colours dancing in bass-notes
for flames in the black smoke
for the festivals of soft-notes
— all in the soil of desolate grave.

But, in the grave
nothing could be found
except the pain
except the tattered, semi-charred notes.

Discussions so far should have made it clear that even though the thrust of Jayant Parmar's poetry is on image-making where black flower erupts from the naval of the girl in blue jeans, or words sprout from the womb of ink, or the pen plays a tune on the *Santoor* or the festival of *Holi* inscribe colourful dreams on the body with the delicate fingers of a child, or the *peepal* tree tying bells over its ankles, or the peacock drawing the moon as a *teeka*-mark on the forehead of sky with peacock-feathers, leaves falling from the sun or ink breathing in the naval of words. It is nevertheless, clear that this poetry goes beyond image-making to depict that pain of social exploitation which is commonly related to caste politics and 'Dalit' identity. However, these poems of Jayant Parmar, for their artistic qualities, are completely different from regular poetry on such subjects.

I needn't remind the readers here that the task of a critic is not to write elementary lessons on poetry. However, it has been ignored by many critics that while poetry cannot be an act of political agenda or means of attaining political goal, it nevertheless cannot be bereft of the socio-cultural or human values. Further, the act of self-realization and the attempt to understand the self is an integral part of the process of cultural formation. As a result, literary worth is an outcome of blending human suffering and affinities with the form. Hence, poetry or art can never be innocent positions free from any ideological leanings. Ideology is ingrained within the literature, which means that literature formulates its own values of human and cultural relationships and social justice. In literature, everything originates from the inner wards of the heart. In Jayant Parmar's poetry, the warmth of feelings can be constantly felt along in his graphic and dynamic images. He has tasted the venom of social injustice and makes an effort to turn it into an elixir by the various hues of his words. It is worth observing how the knife of dominant traditions and customs cuts through bones of Dalit sensibilities. Urdu by itself represents the voice of the minority. Jayant Parmar's predicament represents a further minority within minority. That is to say, this is subaltern within subaltern, a voice of a marginalised sensibility in real sense. Suppressed in the layers of pain, this 'sigh' also surfaces with the sound of leaves falling in autumn or sun, butterfly and the crimson rose. In the midst of glittering colours, emotionally meaningful poems on mother shock the readers. If one goes deeper in these poems, one will discover in them a meaningful series of rags of historical suffering and the warp and woof of physical torture woven in words:

Mother

She was lighting the hearth
before the sun-rise
The moment smoke entered her breath
the moon coughed.

I woke up on my *Charpai*
As I entered the hut I saw
in place of the firewood
mother was burning
in the hearth.

The Stench of the Hell-Pit

The stench of the hell-pit
used to reach my school
Under the umbrella of sun
she used to descend barefoot
into the hell-pit.

She would soak the animal skins
in salt-water
and scrub them with her frail feet
In return, she'd fetch
a few pieces of meat
for me to eat.

Even today,
while going to my office
when I polish my shoes
with Cherry polish
in their glaze
I see my mother's face
and the stench of the hell-pit
follows me to my office!

Paper-I

In ancient times
they used to write
on ordinary leaves
on *Bhojpatra*

on palm leaves
on chests of trees
on stones
on animal skins
on bronze.
The four *Vedas*
were also written
on *Bhojpatra.*

But,
the dark hymns of tyranny
were inscribed
on my body
Even today....!

This creative account of the long night of injustice and social oppression borders on protest. Jayant Parmar understands the role of an artist in the society. He also knows that creativity is an internal process where every external reality must pass through the process of ecstatic internalization to achieve the required aesthetic effect and impact. The idiom of poetry is different from the language of the newspaper and who can understand this better than an artist. Hence, even when Jayant makes a pledge or raises a voice he does it within the realm of creativity. In 'A Thousand Hands', invoking the history of injustices, he looks forward to the future, while in 'The Will of a Dalit Poet,' the dominant feeling is that of helplessness and vulnerability. However, in my opinion, the masterpiece poem of this series is 'O Morning Breeze,' which can be called the most effective Dalit poem of Urdu where the soul, burdened by centuries of pain, becomes a part of the 'blood-coloured sun':

O Morning Breeze!

Stop by my soul
O morning breeze!

Give me the blood-coloured sun
which has no shadow of clouds
which never sets
in the dark forests of the horizon
I will spin it in my forefinger
like the weapon of Lord Krishna
and hurl it at those—
who cut my tongue
and annihilated it
in the sacred fire, chanting 'OM'
at those
who severed the head
of my flower-like little girl
and burnt it in fire
at those
who released rivers of blood
from the breast of my sister
at those
who buried my father alive
at those
who stripped my mother
in the broad day-light.

The fire that is ablaze in me
will not extinguish
Give me the blood-coloured sun!
O morning breeze
stop by my soul!

I had no intention of writing on the poems of Jayant Parmar but I have a weakness: the criticism which unravels the creative process and leads to pleasure and delight is a kind of mental luxury because it is connected to the inner desire. It requires single-mindedness and leisure— both rare for me these days. This manuscript has been lying with me for quite some time. Jayant Parmar must have given up on me, I am sure, as he stopped bringing it up. Recently, when I got an opportunity to visit Leipzig

Book Fair in Germany, I carried this MSS along. Leipzig is Goethe's city and also that of my favourite philosopher Saussure. Although the weather was freezing cold but the centuries old buildings of the university were full of the warmth of enthusiasm, and cafes and pubs were buzzing with life. I looked at these poems whenever I found time; I had read them before also but full and close reading is a different thing altogether. Slowly, the poems began to make effect and enter into me. Criticism is anyway not the last world, and hence, there is nothing wrong in accepting that appreciation is not possible without being 'subjective'. In any case, the stuff and material of Jayant Parmar's poetry is different from others, which means that the easel, brush, palette of colours and strokes can be discerned only by the eyes of the mind along with the melting pot of words. Now, it is up to the readers to give this quiet, reclusive and yet effective poet some space in our hearts.

(Translated from the Urdu by Nishat Zaidi)

Foreword

By

Balraj Komal

Jayant Parmar's first collection 'Aur' was published in 1999, though I had been introduced to his poetry a few years before that. The blurb of 'Aur' carried my opinion in a paragraph, which ended with the sentence that 'The voice of Jayant Parmar is a unique voice in the contemporary Urdu Nazm.' The opinion of critics and scholars that came to the fore after the publication of 'Aur' bears witness to the fact that not only was his poetry admired but also its facets were openly acknowledged. Jayant Parmar's creative journey continued after the publication of *Aur* in all its natural instinct and beauty. His latest anthology *Pencil aur Doosri Nazmein* (it also carries ghazals), is a living example of Parmar's high creative energy.

There are various dimensions to the creative expression of Jayant Parmar. Some of his nazms are dedicated to those creative writers and poets whom he admires. These include those who have already achieved the status of 'classic' in their respective art forms, as well as those who have already covered many milestones of their creative journey and are inclined to achieve further heights. Jayant even pays tribute to those artists who are no longer alive, for the vision he shared with them. Jayant also celebrates the creative and aesthetic elements that he shares with his contemporaries. This list of writers and artists includes poets such as Amir Khusrau, Ghalib, Wali Gujarati, Marina Tsvetayeva, Octavio Paz, Miraji, Salahuddin Parvez, Kumar Pashi, Nida Fazli, Aziz Parihar, Shamim Hanafi, Mohammad Alvi (as also yours truly), painters like Van Gogh, Gauguin, Ram

Kumar, M.F. Hussain, Salvador Dali and Amrita Shergill; singers like Rasoolan Bai, Faiyaz Khan, Hussain Bakhsh, Sufis like Nizamuddin Auliya, critics like Waris Alvi and Shamsur Rahman Farooqi and fiction writers like Naiyyer Masood. I consider writings, dedicated to these artists, an evidence of the unique individual aesthetic act of the poet. Had these writings been bereft of this quality, I would have considered them in the category of mere versification.

Many nazms of Jayant Parmar are an outcome of his observations during his wide travels. They are not only photographic but also capture the colours of fundamental human thoughts that emerge in these places.

A few colours recur in the poetry of Parmar such as red, golden, black and also the colours of earth, sea and sky. Pencil too is an instrument of a specific colour. These colours mirror the various aesthetic states of Jayant Parmar's mind.

Parmar experiences the metamorphosis of the manifest nature, humans, flora and fauna, the cycle of life and death and their parallel, mutual and conflicting motions. This way he presents a multidimensional perspective of the aspects of human life concomitant with its varied sounds and colours. Life continues as a consequence of these actions and reactions. Death is apparently the end, though it also carries the possibility of another journey. In Jayant Parmar's poetry, relationships range from the humans to the rise and fall of civilizations. History, facets of destruction and creation, negative and positive, expected and unexpected destinations, familiar and unfamiliar, all participate in his poetic journey. Is it possible to preserve only the good? Jayant is naturally inclined to preserve everything good. In the chaos of elements, Parmar is endowed with the aesthetic glory of an attractive collage, a pleasant symphony.

My aforesaid comments regarding Parmar's poetry might suggest the preponderance of philosophical streak in Parmar's poetry and the way he attempts to express his philosophy in his unique form. The truth is that Parmar is not a philosopher from any angle. He is through and through a poet. He always prioritises action over words. He is opposed to statement or sloganeering in poetry. He chooses his words based on their rhythm and texture. He regards his words to the extent that he carefully avoids repetition, wordiness and excess. His journey is local, national, trans-national and universal at the same time. The fundamental facet of Parmar's poetry is his ability to raise the subjective to the level of abstraction. He raises words to the heights where they can capture the music and scenes. His poem 'Ghalib' is a good example of this:

> Whenever I read you
> In each and every word I witness
> the sky blossoming.
> In each and every line I witness
> The shadow of the universe,
> expanding. (*Ghalib*)

Wet paper, moist sand, sea, earth and sky, stars, flora and fauna, fields and meadows, lanes and by-lanes, changing seasons and the varied hues of the universe do not assure the creation of tomorrow. But from birth to death, their manifestation, creation and destruction, at times in the manner of routine, at times dramatic, become the source of creation and fountainhead of light. Parmar attempts to find himself in all these elements—at times as an individual, at times as a witness and an onlooker, at times as a painter and at times as an artist who is a poet, singer, historian, biographer at the same time and is searching for his identity in the forest of identities.

Parmar explores the heights of his being while remaining rooted to earth. We often hear these days about Dalit concerns. Dalit poetry and literature is being created in many languages of India. Progressive poetry, in spite of its claims to make the poor labourers and farmers as subject matter of poetry, failed to match this new trend, which is known as Dalit literature. In fact, Urdu literature has never had any movement, which can be termed as Dalit literature movement. We have also not had any author or poet in Urdu whom we could identify with Dalit concerns.

In this background, Jayant Parmar is perhaps the only poet in Urdu (though he expresses Dalit concerns in his Gujarati writings also) who has made Dalit concerns the subject of his poetry. His poems dealing with Dalit concerns carry a unique flavour of their own. This facet of his poetry places him in the line of Dalit poets writing in other languages. His poem 'The Will of a Dalit Poet' is a good example of it:

> Oh what legacies,
> a Dalit poet leaves behind—
> a paper soaked in blood,
> a dark sun
> on the night's crown,
> a river of fire
> on the nib of the pen,
> his ancestor's lantern.
>
> He never attacks you
> with symbols,
> metaphors,
> personalities.
> A beast's burden,
> he is a wounded shadow himself,
> he has no existence;
> he is no different
> from a broken cup!
>
> As one,
> who conjures images
> from clay and cow dung,
> he has at least the sense to know,
> that art lives on
> in the hourglass,
> in the fragrance
> of the exiled earth,
> in the sunflower of rebellions,
> in the spear of the pen,
> in the ink of the ink-pot,
> art lives on.

But now he is searching
for his own identity.
He seeks his own self.
He calls himself with pride,
a Dalit.

In the rotten society where the oppression of Dalit has continued for centuries, 'The Stench of the Hell-Pit' exists forever,

The Stench of the Hell-Pit

The stench of the hell-pit
used to reach my school.
Under the umbrella of sun,
she used to descend barefoot,
into the hell-pit.

She would soak the animal skins
in salt-water,
and scrub them with her frail feet.
In return, she'd fetch
a few pieces of meat,
for me to eat.

Even today,
while going to my office,
when I polish my shoes,
with Cherry polish,
in their glaze,
I see my mother's face,
and the stench of the hell-pit
follows me to my office!

Resistance is almost absent in Urdu poetry. Resistance can both be violent and peaceful. Peaceful resistance is what one associates with Gandhi. Violence too has become a mode of resistance in contemporary times. Jayant's poem 'Africa' is an expression of this kind of resistance.

Use of everyday language and expression, avoidance of Persianate diction and ornate expressions are some of the unique features of Parmar's poetry. Precision is another unique quality of his poetry. Since Parmar is essentially a painter, his nazms carry the beauty of both poetry and painting.

Though Parmar has chosen to call his anthology *Pencil aur Doosri Nazmein*, he equally excels in writing ghazal. In consonance with his nazms, his ghazals too are marked by the simplicity of language and avoiding of ornate Persianate diction. His ghazals fall in the category of 'Sahle-Mumtana' due to their choice of words and selection of rhyme and rhythm. Here are a few examples:

> I look for the shadow of flower in words
> This passion is my test, my scrutiny.
>
> ———
>
> The bright backyard,
> the sun smiling ever,
> descending in every window—
> a flower.
>
> ———
>
> Never ever pass by that path,
> Rumours are ripe in the lane.
>
> ———
>
> The crazy savage wind fills the head,
> Who knows what's wrong with the city;
>
> ———
>
> It interacts with the body—
> the touch of wind in the rain.

Rhythm is one of the fundamental problems in Urdu poetry. Jayant Parmar has not made much use of traditional rhythms. His poetry carries a pleasant mix of traditional and non-traditional rhythms. He prefers common words and uses them in a manner that raises them from the mundane to the unique heights of aesthetics. They become so inviting that the readers are lost in the poetry. Parmar is well acquainted with the creative traditions of Urdu poetry but he has kept himself free from the burden of its non-creative aspects.

Some poets are born only once in their poetry and keep repeating the same all their life. The greatness of Jayant Parmar lies in the fact that he is born every time afresh in his nazms and experiences the creative embodiment of his poetry.

(Translated from the Urdu by Nishat Zaidi)

Foreword

You and I
dream together,
dreams of varied hues,
dreams, which are bright too…
like the twilight goblet
in the hand of the dawn,
like a firefly
in the black mantle of the night,
like an ocean of sky
in the dewdrop of eyes.

I have something
in the wet soil of my heart,
buried and concealed,
in the chest inside me,
which unravels through speech,
and gets exposed
on the wet paper,
in strings of words and meanings.
That is the 'Me' of my nazms.
That is the 'Me' of my dreams.

◆ ◆ ◆

Ghalib

Whenever I read you,
in each and every word as though,
I see the sky blossoming,
in each and every line I glimpse
the shadows of the universe,
expanding.

* * *

I am Sure...

that the sweet fragrance of the wet earth
will live on,
in the winding narrow alleys of my blood.
It will live on,
in the blue moisture of my veins,
like yellow waves
in the lanes of a cornfield.
It will stay,
even after the doomsday,
in the twilight tree of my blood,
in the tales of my body ruins,
in the brightness of the dark,
in the dawn,
in the declining night.
I will rise one day
together with the earth.
I am sure!

I am sure,
that the throbbing of the earth,
these worlds,
these dancing waves,
these papers of azure skies,
this darkness of the night
will remain preserved
in the ayats[1] of my poems!
I am sure!

⁂

---

[1] Translator's Note: Ayat: Arabic word for 'signs' or evidence. The word is usually used to refer to the smallest unit of the Qur'an.

I am born again and again in Poems

(For Nida Fazli)

I am born
again and again
in my poems.

The brown ocean
strives to touch
the azure sky
with arms of its waves, outstretched.
The sword of lightning
flashes across the mountain.
Dark clouds summon
the peacock plumes.
In the arms of trees
flowers spread fragrance.
I am born again and again
in my poems.

The night often adorns
its dark fingers
with the ring of million stars.
The morning sun
with its russet ink
writes slogans
on the walls of the city.

The lanes turn into torch lights
as they come out on the highways,
each and every hand,

a procession.
I am born again and again
in poems.

In the forlorn courtyard of my heart,
when I hear
the poems of dried leaves,
I put them in my diary.
I am born again and again
in poetry.

⌑ ⌑ ⌑

For Shamsur Rahman Faruqi

I pass through the stages of separation and union,
In ghazals, I pass through Mir's majestic tradition.

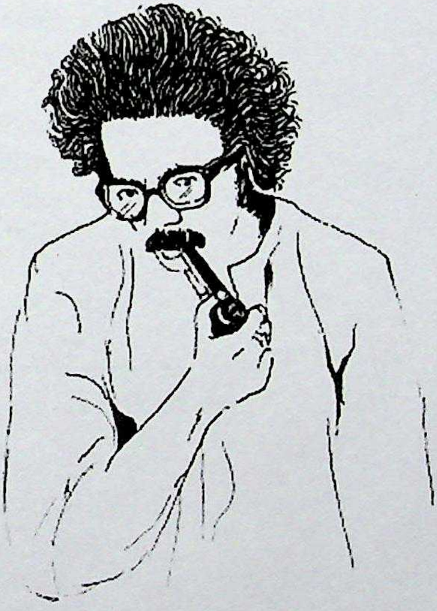
I pass through the writings of the dark night,
I am in search of that one radiant expression.

I will shrink the world into one tiny dot,
I pass through the green cloud's creation.

A little glow lingers in the last star of the night,
I pass through the book of evening, its illustrations.

The water in the pool of my eyes is all blood,
I pass through the curse of dreams, their limitations.

⌑ ⌑ ⌑



Pencil - I

The girl in the blue jeans,
sitting on the bench
sharpens her pencil
and out comes from it
a black flower.

The pencil writes
black letters
like the black butterflies
on a blank paper.

The pencil writes
white letters,
like the sun, moon and stars,
on the canvas of the sky.

The pencil writes
golden wings
on the arms of the universe,
like the dreams of the girl.

¤ ¤ ¤

Pencil - II

Near the leg of a table,
a paralysed hand
asked a broken blue pencil,
"Can you write?"

The pencil faltered
and said,
"Yes, I can write,
and can even draw your pictures,
if only
you could peel off with blade
the plaster of my delicate body!"

In rapture,
I listened on
to Husain Bakhsh
on Zee TV,
"Let the wine and the cup remain...!!"

* * *

Pencil - III

My little girl,
lovely little girl,
kindles a pencil
with her sharpener.

The light begins to spread
on the horizon of the white paper—

A black bird
flying away with a tree.
Goggles
on the eyes of a peacock.
A fire-chariot
flying in the sky.
An aeroplane
moving on the road.
A leopard
chatting with the cow.
The one-eyed sun
on a black tree,
with a patch of cloud over it.
A blue fish
flying over the forehead
of the cloud.
A yellow butterfly
floating on the waves of cascades.

My lovely little girl
draws what all images
in her fun and fantasy!

But whenever,
the school master
gives her homework,
my dear little doll
often, in her anger
breaks away its tip
and the candlelight of the pencil
extinguishes,
only the smoke remains
on the sky of the white paper.

⁂

Dawn breaks and it's the river of sunlight,
Batting eyelids, the pathways come to light.

Shadows depart from the body-prison,
The one awake the whole life, takes the flight.

The same old dream dawned yet again,
in the city of sleep, in the final phase of the night.

From the recesses of my heart, on to my lips,
in the name of Mohammad, comes out a light.

It looks sad like me, perhaps—
the star that descended on the river-side.

* * *

Paper - I

In ancient times,
they used to write
on ordinary leaves,
on *Bhojpatra,*
on palm leaves,
on chests of trees,
on stones,
on animal skins,
on bronze.
The four *Vedas*
were also written
on *Bhojpatra.*

But,
the dark hymns of tyranny
were inscribed
on my body.
Even today....!

* * *

Paper - II

One day,
I was discovered
by ink,
and I reached the tender hands
in each and every house on the earth.
I conversed
like a kite,
with clouds, moon and stars.

The nib of the pen
kissed my hand,
my every pore
turned into the *santoor* symphony.
The splash of the brush,
played *Holi* colours with my body,
and the rainbow in my veins
was shaken out of slumber.

Tender fingers of a small child
wrote vibrant dreams on my body—
the sun, the butterfly, the crimson rose.

* * *

The Pen-friendly Paper

Old, rugged hands of Junnu Mian
gave me a second life.
The bark of a tree,
the silken wood,
the bamboo,
the rags of cloth,
and the news-paper pulp —
all were used
to render me
my unmatched beauty.
I was adorned
with flowers and leaves,
with silken threads
and the russet grass.
My body was messaged
with camel bones
to make it velvety,
and 'Ya Qayyoom'[1]
was penned on it
in letters, pretty.
The pen too danced
in ecstasy.

¤ ¤ ¤

---

[1] Translator's Note: one of the ninety-nine names of God in the Holy Qur'an, it means O Omnipresent!

Every time
a bird shrieks,
a sea of
silence breaks.

The window of the eyes
is still open,
inside the room
someone is awake.

The lustreless piece
of vibrant sunshine,
strays solitary
over the hills.

From dense forests
to the valleys vast,
the path of wind
is never straight.

The dark room at
the turn of the lane,
recognises
our foot-steps.

The waves call out
in a loud voice;
the ocean connects
both its shores.

◆ ◆ ◆

I have seen him Many Times on the Easel!

(For Van Gogh)

I have seen him
from many angles—
from the left, from the right,
and then bending down from below,
in lines suppressed
underneath the layers of colours—
a face lustreless
like the jaundiced sunshine,
like a fresh wound in the strokes of brush,
all pains, agonies,
hidden inside the heart's cellar
and lines tousled
like severed threads
unkempt.

I have seen him
many times on the easel—
In the midnight!
In sunflowers!

◆ ◆ ◆

Sunflowers

Dear...!
Very Dear
Van Gogh!!
You left us
for no reason,
and sit now in the seventh heaven.
Here on earth,
around your grave
flowers blossom
...sunflowers,
the ones you painted on the canvas,
exactly like them!

Throughout the day
these sunflowers
bend over your grave
and offer prayers!

⁂

The Black Bird of Sorrow

(For Van Gogh)

Your story
is not just a story
of eyes,
brush or palette,
but a moving story
of a lonesome heart
that fluttered
in the dungeon of deep darkness
and knew not why
a black bird of sorrow
flew before his face
since eternity.

◆ ◆ ◆

Crows over the Corn Field[1]

The black crows
hover over the yellow cornfields
like death.
After a while,
the black crows in the sky
clutch Van Gogh
in their dark wings,
and fly away
towards the grave of the yellow sky.

⁂

---

[1] Van Gogh committed suicide after making his painting titled 'Crows over corn field'.

Ram Kumar's Paintings

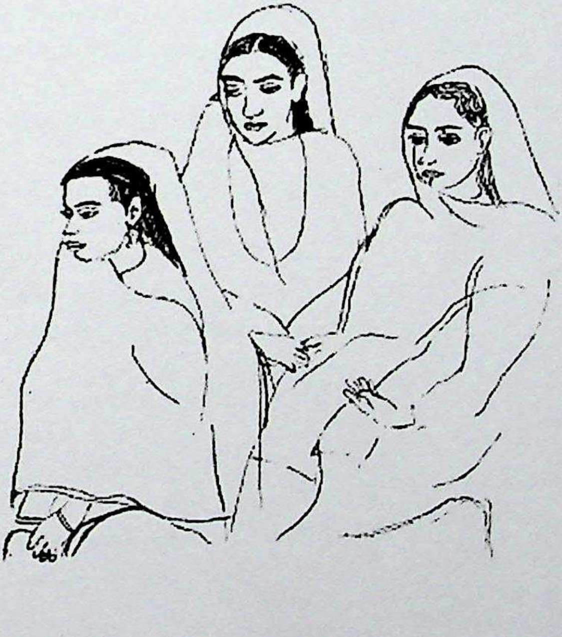
Paintings with colours
like the colours of dilapidated walls.
Scratch these paintings a little
and they brighten your heart.
Gloom on the faces
of lonely labours
and missing men.
Beneath these layers of colours lie,
pain, agony, loneliness.

Houses have replaced human figures now—
Houses tell,
through their walls
and windows,
tales of barren shadows.

Houses look like cobwebs—
a disarray of windows, lattices,
and the semblance
of zigzag passages at places.

The brown, black lines conjure
new identities, everyday.

* * *



A Poem of Pale Sadness

(For Amrita Shergill)

Amrita!
Though like Cezanne,
you do not dilute
colours like water;
you borrow from Gauguin
pale sadness
like the singing of Rasulan Bai:

Often on the brown background,
sad faces,
bleary eyes,
wandering souls,
moisten the pages of the heart.

The spell of colours on canvas
conjure faces—
the dialogue between
the brush and colours,
that just began,
has abruptly ended.

Unfolding on the canvas now,
is a poem of pale sadness.

◆ ◆ ◆

The gust of wind beckons,
Whom does the casement summon?

The shadow of the tree cries out aloud,
'How long will I remain in prison!'

'Preserve the memories of the past',
the fleeting moment thus sermons.

Lo! The dazzling butterfly has flown away,
The body of desert is left to mourn.

A bird in the sky calls somewhere,
Its wings dictate plume's direction.

Evenings cry out at places,
At places the morn beckons.

◆ ◆ ◆

Drawing

A pencil,
lying in a pen stand,
on the table
of jujube wood,
looks intently
at the vibrant synthetic flowers
smiling in the vase.
The ashen dust of time
in the fireplace
is raising its head.
A breast
is pressed beneath
a paper-weight;
on the slope of another breast
awaken
the dark fingers of
frenzy.

⁂

Painting

On a broad wide canvas,
two barbed-wire fences
flanked by two mirrors—
as you look into the mirror
running to vast distances
is one rusty barbed-wire fence
and the stone walls.

We also build
barbed-wire fences around us.
We also live
in the prison of walls,
die,
every passing moment.

⌑ ⌑ ⌑

Art Gallery

An art gallery
manifests itself before my vision.

How neatly arranged
are the new portraits,
drawings,
sculptures –
my life,
my sorrows and happiness,
all painted on the canvas.

Van Gogh's sunflower,
Swaminathan's birds,
the weary watches of Dali
hanging from the tree,
Gauguin's nude woman,
all seem familiar—
moments,
when you hear
with your eyes,
not with your ears.

Changing scenes
Changing seasons
Changing faces

In water colours
In linocut
In etchings.

I am in the art gallery—
As I look at these paintings for hours,
someone watches me
as though,
I were a painting,
as though, I were a sculpture.

◆ ◆ ◆

Marina Tsvetayeva[1]-I

Every evening,
in the shadow of the setting sun,
I go to the graveyard
in search of the tombstone
that has your name on it.

But here,
there is no name,
no epitaph
on any grave.
All graves are nameless—
who knows which grave
is your resting place.

I know,
somewhere here,
you lie in deep slumber.
I light a lamp on every grave.
Everyday, I come here
to search for my grave.

⁂

---

[1] Marina Tsvetayeva (1892-1941), Russian poet who committed suicide on August 1, 1941.

Marina Tsvetayeva-II

Your poems,
like phoenix,
taking birth
out of their own ashes
sing softly
on a bare branch
in the courtyard
of my heart,
and make me cry
day and night.

◆ ◆ ◆

I Have Seen Paz

I saw Paz[1]
at the tomb of Amir Khusrau,
in the pale shade of the evening,
under the dome of words and music
between Nizamuddin Aulia, a mendicant
and Amir Khusrau.
Sleeping under the arches
of poems—
I have seen Paz.

¤ ¤ ¤

---

[1] Octavio Paz (1914-1998) Mexican Poet and Critic.

Pale, wilted, withered flower.
On boughs, here and there
a flower.

All figures are faded—
The moon, the stars,
the face and the flower.

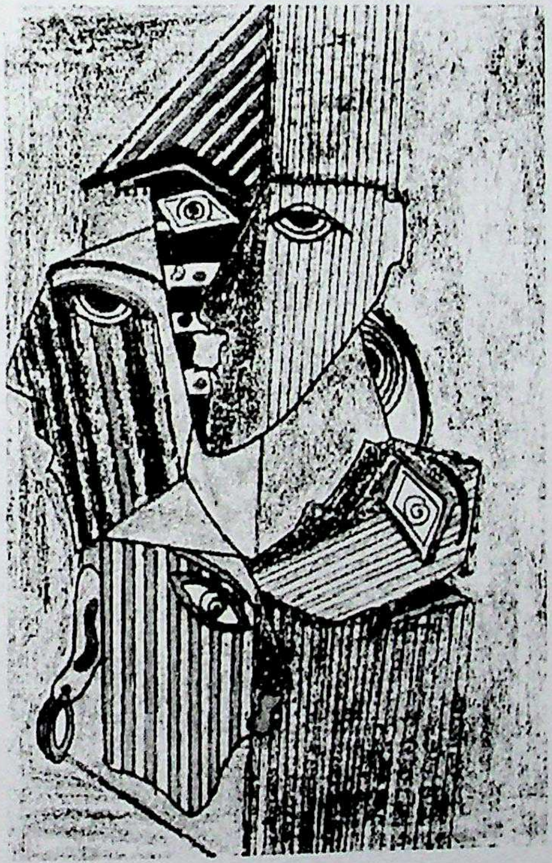
Lanes, offices,
rooms and squares—
inside, outside,
scattered, the flower.

The bright backyard,
the sun smiling ever,
descending in every window—
a flower.

In each body
every speck of dust.
Truth— the fragrance.
Lie— the flower.

The doors await the pathways.
In the evening,
smoulders the heart,
a flower.

¤ ¤ ¤



Death

Death means—
departure of words
and meanings
from heart's dwelling;
footprints of autumn
on the leaves of
passion.

Death means—
treading time after time
the sterile path
of 'qafia' and 'radif';
reading proofs of poems
composed long back;
despair
        of that fine creation
still in the making.

Death means—
moths eat away
your wings;
the brown paper of the sky
gets burnt in the window.

Death means—
the black grass begins to grow
from the eyes of the moon,

from its ears,
mouth,
breast,
and navel.
Death means—

* * *

The Day of Death

Hanging
the very old,
tattered shirt of shadow
from a peg,
I dropped the body case
in one corner of the house
and walked out
stealthily.

◆ ◆ ◆

Death, an Experience

I

A new destination,
a new voyage –
no flowers in vases,
yet fragrance all around.

II

Last night,
as soon as the light
was suddenly put out in the room,
the darkness descended
surreptitiously,
and with it,
for no reason,
your memory
returned to me.

* * *

Blackboard

(For Aziz Parihar)

Blackboard—
a window,
and within it,
many more windows
lying closed.
When I write
with a white chalk,
they open up one by one,
stars shining in each window.
The light begins to spread inside me,
and I become,
a pool of lights.

◆ ◆ ◆

Miraji's[1] Portrait

A turban on his head,
large ear-rings in the ears,
a bead necklace around the neck,
in his arm, an amulet—
wandering around the world,
knocking at the door
in the city of words:
A dervish.

⁂

---

[1] Miraji,(1912-1949) an unconventional poet who inaugurated the modernist phase in Urdu poetry.

Time weaves spider-webs.
For many days,
the house has been lying deserted.

The tic-tac of the pendulum tells,
Someone plucks off time's wings.

Holding pink flags in hands,
someone stands in the blazing sun.

The green vagrants of the dawn
witnessed—
An angel lying on the grass.

Suddenly, the paper-weight of the day
tumbled
and soon vanished in some deep well.

On the pale margins of the morning breeze,
What is written
in the lines of the rays of the sun!

◆ ◆ ◆

For the Dalit

I will write
a grand epic
of your sorrow
on the burnished breast
of the sun.

* * *

Mother

She was lighting the hearth
before the sun-rise.
The moment smoke entered her breath,
the moon coughed.

I woke up on my *Charpai.*
As I entered the hut I saw,
in place of the firewood
Mother was burning
in the hearth.

* * *

The Stench of the Hell-Pit

The stench of the hell-pit
used to reach my school.
Under the umbrella of the sun,
she used to descend barefoot,
into the hell-pit.

She would soak the animal skins
in salt-water,
and scrub them with her frail feet.
In return, she'd fetch
a few pieces of meat,
for me to eat.

Even today,
while going to my office,
when I polish my shoes,
with Cherry polish,
in their glaze,
I see my mother's face,
and the stench of the hell-pit
follows me to my office!

* * *

Mother's Worry

Ever seen Mother
spreading linen
on the *charpai*?
How she pulls the bed-linen
from one side,
straightens it
from the other,
lest any fold
should hurt your body.

⁂

My Numb Fingers do not have the Strength

On the chest of the writing table,
in the pale lamp-light,
your letter
waits for me,
for many days.

Should I write to you?
But my love,
how do I write to you?
My numb fingers do not have the strength.
How do I hold the pencil?
The sharp pointed black pencil.
Once it was my weapon.
I shall pass that pencil now
to the hands of a little moon.

* * *

A Thousand Hands

I had asked for a house
and they buried me
under the earth.
I had asked
for a small piece of land,
they placed the millstone
of migration on my head.
I had asked for bread,
they placed
a burning ember
on my tongue.
I only asked for a book
and they spilled
molten lead
into my ears.
I raised my head
and they fastened fetters
around my neck.
when I marched out on the road,
holding flag in my hand,
they severed my hands
and threw it away.

But one day,
my blood
will soften the parched land;
and a thousand hands
will grow—

my hands,
thousands of hands,
and tyranny's last night.

* * *

The Will of a Dalit Poet

Oh what legacies,
a Dalit poet leaves behind!
A paper soaked in blood,
a dark sun
on the night's crown,
a river of fire
on the nib of the pen,
his ancestor's lantern.

He never attacks you
with symbols,
metaphors,
personalities.
A beast's burden,
he is a wounded shadow himself,
he has no existence;
he is no different
from a broken cup!

As one,
who conjures images
from clay and cow dung,
he has at least the sense to know,
that art lives on
in the hourglass,
in the fragrance of the exiled earth,
in the sunflower of rebellions,
in the spear of the pen,

in the ink of the ink-pot,
art lives on.

But now he is searching
for his own identity.
He seeks his own self.
He calls himself with pride,
a Dalit.

* * *

It hung from the peg of words,
A line that was tattered and battered.

Fear had taken refuge inside me.
From the desert, drum-beats were heard.

Waves were lost in each other,
I stood at the shore, regretful, unheard.

The din of his being prevailed till separation,
And then neither I nor my shadow lingered.

That which perched on breath's bough,
To the far-off sky, flew away that bird.

How could I set my eyes on my path?
In heart's chamber such noise blared.

Who passed through the desolate heart?
Every speck gleamed and glittered.

How blank was the paper of my heart!
Your touch made it rainbow coloured.

I had come out of home for a trifle,
All paths of my return blurred.

My saviour, I could not recognize you,
Clad in dazzling light, you'd entered.

⌑ ⌑ ⌑

Panthers

In the dark of the night,
with necks in chains,
clad in the moon-light skin,
the panthers roam about
like defeated soldiers.

Tyrants adorned your body with wounds.
From thousands of lesions
drips the black blood.
My myth,
my epic,
the flame of my poetry—
my hands crave
to kiss
your shining moon-lit hair!

I will fill the colours of fire
in every wound.
I will write the sun
on your moon-like foreheads.

⁂

O Morning Breeze!

Stop by my soul,
O morning breeze!

Give me the blood-coloured sun,
which has no shadow of clouds over it,
which never sets
in dark forests of the horizon.
I will spin it with my forefinger
like the weapon of Lord Krishna
and hurl it at those
who cut my tongue
and annihilated it
in the sacred 'yagna' fire
chanting 'Om Svaha'
at those
who severed the head
of my flower-like little girl
and burnt it in fire
at those
who released rivers of blood
from the breast of my sister;

at those,
who buried my father alive;
at those,
who stripped my mother
in the broad day-light.

Fire within me will extinguish not.
Give me the blood-coloured sun!
O morning breeze,
stop by my soul!

* * *

Shoes

My shoes carry me
to the snow-covered rocks,
to pine-woods,
to villages, towns and cities.

My shoes carry me
to the new lands across oceans
to the new worlds beyond skies.

My shoes carry me
to the parliament,
and to the UNO.

My shoes carry me
to *gurudwara* and to church
to mosques
and to *Agiari.*

But when my shoes
take me to a temple,
I am thrown out of it
like shoes!!!

◆ ◆ ◆

Who is it, who for her mourned?
My sorrow was my own alone.

To whom did the lonely tree,
After the night-fall beckon?

The window was waving adieu,
To the last star of the evening.

The state of my heart was like,
Quivering leaves and blossoms.

I drew a window on a paper,
which had in it your visage.

⁂

The Tomb of Faiyaz Khan[1]

The marble tombstone
of Faiyaz Khan
bending over the rubbles of his ruined grave,
searches—
for *sa-re-ga-ma-pa-dha-ni...*
for *abir* and *gulaal*[2] bowing in devotion,
for the moist melody of *Malkos*[3]
for colours dancing in bass-notes
for flames in the black smoke
for the festivals of soft-notes
— all in the soil of the desolate grave.

But, in the grave,
nothing could be found,
except the pain,
except the tattered, semi-charred notes.

⁂

---

[1] Translator's Note: Ustad Faiyaz Khan, of Agra Gharana of Hindutani classical music was known for his Khayal vocals.

[2] Translator's Note: Saffron and rose colours of the festival of Holi.

[3] Translator's Note: A popular raga of Hindustani music Malkos, malkouans or malkosh is sung at midnight.

That which was better

I have forsaken
that, which was better.
At the precise moment,
I climbed down one step,
moving away from my destination.
Education, emotions, happiness,
culture and traditions-
all began to seem sham.
How irrelevant I was
in my own eyes,
a mere question!
I have ended up, where
I didn't want to go.

That, which was better
I have forsaken that!

* * *

The City

In a flash,
it fell into the river of blood.
Dragging itself on its palms
it barely got up.
Its forehead and temples
still bleeding,
one hand,
hanging from a sling,
one leg wounded by the gunshot.
With great difficulty,
with the help of crutches,
it straightens its back,
and tries to stand up.

◆ ◆ ◆

March Second[1]

March second,
your resplendent forehead
was branded black.

Wali[2]!
You once sowed an innocent heart,
in some corner of this land.
You used to tell me with great pride,
'I am a Gujarati.'
But your own city
has razed every single brick
of your grave.

My city too
has withered away
flowers of devotion.
My love,
You are soaked in blood!
I, too, am soaked in blood!

March second,
your resplendent forehead
was branded black.

⁂

---

[1] Translator's Note: March 2, Post Godhra riots in Gujarat that raged mainly between February 27 and March 3, 2002 in which many people were killed and Wali Deccani's grave was desecrated.

[2] Translator's Note: Wali Gujarati (1667–1707), also known as Wali Deccani, was a classical Urdu poet of the subcontinent.

Dark Ghazal-I
(For Ahmedabad)

Which city's dead-body is it?
It is so badly rotten!

Never ever pass by that path,
Rumours are ripe in the lane.

God too has left in fear,
Mosque again is silent.

I've been wandering for many days,
My grave is lost somewhere around.

Our dear goat is dead now,
For a few days, let's lament.

Wait, let me also lend my shoulder,
It is my city's funeral procession.

◆ ◆ ◆

Dark Ghazal-II

(For Ahmedabad)

It was my own city.
My confidence – a falsity.

A devil stood over my chest—
The nightmare was scary.

That which burnt away in fire,
was the flower of green affinity.

Who could I call for help?
Who was there in the vicinity?

True, it dwelled inside me—
the man, who was so beastly.

Happy it was, to burn a house,
It was indeed my own city.

◆ ◆ ◆

A Morning in Darjeeling

Having cast a net of fog
there stands in the valley pond,
a girl with a rose face.
The dazzling leaf of the sun
will soon wither away
from the forehead of trees.

The bird of sunlight,
hiding
in the fragrant tea-gardens,
will soon fly away
at the sound of darkness.
Who has stolen
the butterfly of sunlight
from your cheeks?

* * *

Toy Train

Whenever
the 'Prestige' cooker
whistles in my kitchen,
it echoes in my ears.
I feel as though—
a toy train spitting smoke
has begun to run
chugging along
a narrow gauge track
with inflated nostrils.
On its way,
it waves to the pine trees,
saying,
'I will return
in the evening'.

As soon as the last whistle blows,
it stops at a hill station,
exhausted.

* * *

On the Way to Gangtok

The fluttering feel of Teesta river in the wind,
fumes like frenzy
in the mountain furrows.
The fragrance of nude bodies
of the lovely blooms
stirs up the blood,
as it enters the senses.

The eastern horses on the other side,
raise the sky on their heads,
as they ride the swift winds.
Oceans of grey waters
float in the furrows,
the antelopes of clouds
galloping on the ground,
seraphic trees
clad in golden silk dreams,
the ewes of sunlight
grazing in dense forests.
Lo, even the sun pauses here
to touch your body!
How can I contain
the suns neighing in my blood?

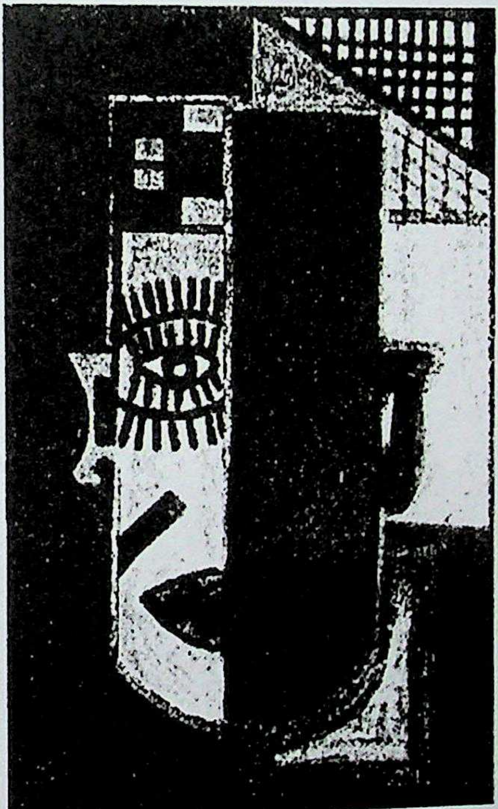
◆ ◆ ◆

Mani Karan

Surrounded by hills
from all sides,
as if a mendicant's bowl;
entering this bowl,
the river *Parvati*—
restless, agitated,
furious river;
it cuts through the hills
that come in its way
and moves on.

On the one side,
immersed in the chanting
of *Guru Granth Sahib*
with cold water in its palm.
On the other,
brewing tea
in the hot spring water
and drinking it from the earthen pot,
blowing away the cold
clinging to its body,
there lies
Mani Karan!

◆ ◆ ◆



Africa

At midnight,
white officers of the Special Branch,
drag like dogs,
the dead-bodies
of Negro boys and girls.
They take off clothes
from their life-less bodies.
On the blue blouse of the girl
bruises are visible all over—
the gun-shot torn sun.
The killers drink whisky
in the mortuary,
and sing loudly
songs of joy
and celebrations!

I keep all my books
back on the shelf;
pick up the gun
lying in some corner of the house
and clean it
with kerosene.

* * *

Moonlight, fragrant with flowers of touch,
Moonlight, drenched in the rain of memory.

The sun fell down into the river of evening,
Moonlight burst from the branches of the night.

As it burnt in the ashes of cigarettes,
Moonlight, dark in sorrow's forests.

Under the dark shade of the night trees,
Moonlight, whose forehead did you kiss?

She cannot see the pebbles of the morn
Moonlight stumbles in its blindness.

A paper of wet moon was in my hands,
Moonlight lay scattered on my table.

Let it not commit suicide in distress
Moonlight, lonely in the sky.

⌑ ⌑ ⌑

Words are Beautiful
(For Mohammed Salahuddin Parvez)

I too have launched
my ark of a poem
in the azure ocean
of poems umpteen!

I know my love,
it does not have
the lights of twinkling stars,
or the varied hues
of green and red flowers.
Yet, I desire,
these words of love
that adorn silent lips
with lovely symphony,
that ignite hope
in these cheerless eyes.

Under the sun coloured shadow,
on the apple-red cheeks
it will be writ like a tender kiss.

In these dark alleys
of tyranny and oppression
some fire-fly of word
will show the path.

Words are beautiful,
like blood, like bludgeon.

* * *

He Smells the Graves of His Ancestors
(For Leopold Senghor[1])

He speaks
to the souls of the black people,
as he chisels with words' knife,
figures of dark rhymes
on a blank paper.

The swift gushes of the African wind,
the green tongues of the dense trees,
the enchanted words of trees and hills,
the sinister cries of the soul,
and the counsel of the dead
reflect clearly in the mirror of the poem.

In the dark odour, in the dark colour,
in the dark touch,
lies the light of truth.
He smells the graves of his ancestors
and listens to their living voices
reverberating in the alleys of the soul.

* * *

---

[1] Leopold Senghor (1906-2001), Famous poet and politician from Senegal.

The crazy savage wind fills the head,
Who knows what's wrong with the city.

We have escaped a circle at last,
But another circle lies ahead.

No drop will shine over the eye-lid,
The well of the heart is dehydrated.

The crimson wings of rays taper,
The sun narrows down to a dark speck.

The sound of the wind hovers at the shore,
For long, the howl of waves is dead.

◆ ◆ ◆

Ink Breaths in His Navel

(For Waris Alvi)

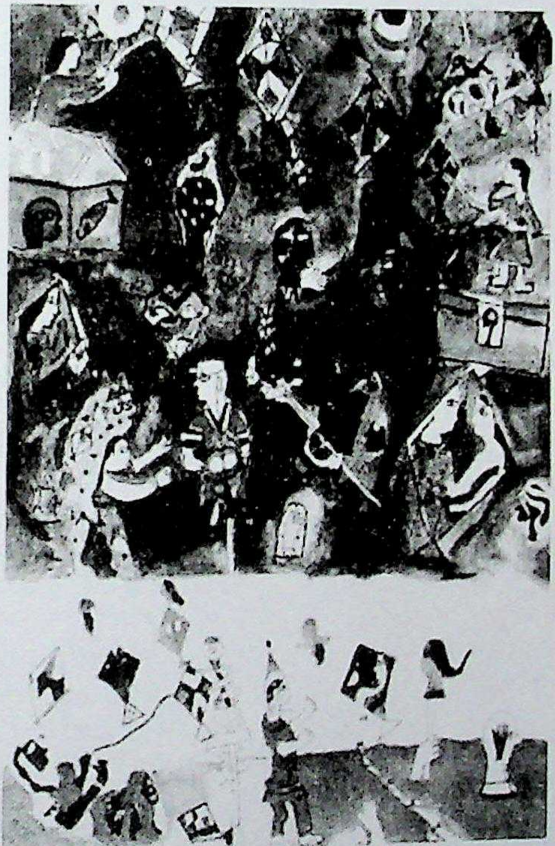
The collyrium of darkness
in a brass eye.
A river of light
in a brass eye.
Butterflies of words
in those lights.
Past, present and future—
a burnished spear—
shining between the fingers.
A bird,
flying in the sky of white clouds,
listens intently
to the amorous whispers
of the brass nib
and the paper.
A river of darkness,
surges forth from the eyes
of the pen
and dreams,
sinking and floating,
appear in the waves of darkness.
Dreams become pen at times,
at times, pen a dream.

Pen has its own black wings—
with its black wings
it soars across the sky,

and tears into pieces
the curtain of darkness
with its long nail.

Ink breaths in his navel.
Flood comes in the moon-lit night.
It is doomsday.

◆ ◆ ◆



In My Eyes

(For Mohammad Alvi)

I know that one day,
these dense dark clouds
will fly me away
on their wintry shoulders.

That day will also come,
when I won't be found
in taverns and goblets
in parties and congregations.

I will fade away,
even from the memory
of morns and eves,
of the afternoon alleys,
of my own family.

The falling leaves,
search for the soil.
I will bury before I leave,
the shadows of my barren breath.

But I also know,
that a young boy
who reads my poems,
will see from my eyes,
those beauteous stars
with awe and wonder,
and call out to me.

It's going to be Night

A star asked another star,
"What's the time my brother?"
Batting the eyelid, the other star
looked at the watch and said,
"It's only nine."
The first star answered,
"My friend! You seem drunk.
It's going to be six now."
And then,
he drew away the window curtain.
The seventh horse of the sun
arrived at the door-step.

A star said to me,
"Come, let's sleep.
It's going to be night."

⁂

For Kumar Pashi

Delhi!
The day I disembarked
at your railway station,
I carried such burden
on my shoulders—
of mine
and of others too.
But today,
I will not take back
anything with me.
                    I will leave it all behind
                              at your platform—
In the entire train,
I am the only one,
who is in raptures,
over a new poem.

◆ ◆ ◆

The Painting of an Evening -I

There stands under a tree,
the sun,
all lonely,
jaundiced, gloomy,
carrying in its hand
a begging bowl,
and in the bowl,
the black leaves fall!

⁂

The Painting of an Evening - 2

Hazy stars twinkling
in the dusk light;
the night still
at the village boundary;
the *peepal* tree
wears bells in its feet
which jingle;
lamps lit in the alcove;
radiant faces.
I draw
on the canvas of the sky
with peacock feathers,
the *tika* mark of the moon!
and the falling leaf of the sun!

* * *

Your Name

I write your name,
with my fingers
on each petal of the flower.
The flower withers away,
but your name,
becomes fragrance;
spreads all around.

◆ ◆ ◆

Who appears in my dream,
In mirage, the flowers gleam.

What countless colours it had,
the jewel, which I kissed in my dream.

And they dazzled in the dark—
Inside the book, all words green.

They were swept away by the river of sleep,
The islands that inhabited my dream.

A fair face appeared in the moon,
Familiar to me, it did seem.

The moon sleeps in the midst of rose,
Open the window to admire the scene.

⁂

A Lane turns from There

A lane turns from there,
in a crooked alley—
an old *peepal* tree on its left,
on its front, a humble hut.
Be it midnight or midday,
the window of her house
forever open;
in the open window,
her face can never be seen though,
yet my heart
longs for that same spot!!

◆ ◆ ◆

Preserved Only in the Album

I am miffed today,
you too are a little sad.
I am restless,
you are also silent.
Why is the date of October 11
missing from the calendar?
You are always surrounded by children;
I too am caught up,
in the affairs of living.
Why has the clock stopped ticking?
All the memories are evaporating—
memories,
that are preserved,
only in the album,
while we wandered outside!

◆ ◆ ◆

Void

Radio, TV, Refrigerator—
I have everything.
Yet it seems,
I have nothing.
In this house fully furnished,
I have begun to fear myself.
A vigil of void all around.
On whose shoulder do I rest my head,
and tell tales of seasons,
good or bad;
share memories,
half-forgotten?
I have no such relations.
Hence, in the loneliness of the night,
in the mirror
I rest my head,
on my own shoulders,
and cry for hours together.

* * *

Come, My Love

Come, my love!
Let's count these words once again.
If only we could gather
these words,
it won't be tough
to toss them in the dark sky
and create stars.

If only, we could put together
these words,
we could transform them
into rainbow colours,
and draw flying hills
on the canvas
like Swaminathan's paintings.

If only, we could gather these words,
we could cast them
into a symphony
like that of Mallikarjun Mansur[1],
and bathe in the green waves
of cadence.

If only, we could weave these words
into poems,
we could stud our finger rings
with a line or two,
and keep them as souvenirs.

◆ ◆ ◆

---

[1] Translator's Note: Mallikarjun Mansur, (1910-1992) was the Indian classical singer of Khayal style of the Jaipur-Atrauli Gharana.

The star did not shine outside the window,
The night passed without the moon;
I am the prince of the fairyland,
And, my eyes devoid of dreams.

Don't ever step into that courtyard, my friend!
where hearts are devoid of love,
and house without any manners.

Let none suffer such fate, my God!
when even during the spring time
the branches are devoid of rose.

The day will come, I know,
when eyes will be devoid of care,
hands devoid of books.

To whom do I offer my poems,
What gathering is this—
a gathering devoid of moon.

* * *

Dream -1

A house has imprisoned
the yellow sun.
But the sun sits at ease
on a chair
and smokes a cigarette—
Its black smoke
spreads all over.
The sleepy winds,
from the chimney of windows,
clear away the black smoke.

* * *

Dream - 2

A fish catches
a bright red star,
and then...

A boat of stars climbs up the hill;
the red star falls down
into the fishpond,
and hides behind the dark trees.

The grey moon rises
from the forest of dense clouds;
tall buildings and bright stars
surround it.

The moon, the boat of bright stars
and the tall buildings,
all fly
in the sky,
like fairies!

⁂

A Wish

Bird!
O small bird!!
Stick your wings on my arms;
I too, like you
have been waiting to fly
in the forest of green sky!

* * *

Rain

On the high peak of clouds,
two dark elephants
scream and shriek.
Then they fight
with their shining swords.
And it rains!

* * *

Each and every path in the rain,
returned drenched in rain.

It smoulders in its own fire—
the lonely city, in the rain.

Those dusty memories mine
wash their faces in the rain.

Lo! How beautiful it looks,
the face of the city in the rain.

A bit of sunlight beckons
on the road in the rain.

A russet window washes away
wounds of the heart in the rain.

The green resolve got glued
to a branch in the rain.

It interacts with the body—
the touch of wind in the rain.

The wreck of my sorrow too
will get washed away in the rain.

A pleasure of season bygone
revisited me in the rain.

* * *

Paralysis

(For Naiyer Masood and Shamim Hanafi)

Paralysis,
earthen coloured paralysis.
A piece of sky,
sitting in the wheelchair.
Over the dark clouds,
flying on extended wings,
the rows of pigeons,
enliven the heart.

Wasted efforts to stir waves
in the crimson sea of blood;
the paralysed light
stares at the flowers;
the paralysed darkness digs
its long, sharp and pointed teeth
into the stiff white bones.

On the tripod,
the citrus smell of fresh lemons,
counts days of drinking
from the eyes swimming in the well.
Not even a sound echoes
in the sixty-five-year-old citadel.

In the desolate skies,
of eyes,
sometimes, for no reason
float the hills of water.

My grandmother gifted me
on my Birthday,
a silver filigree box,
with a mirror inside
like the grey moon.
I open it whenever I find
feathers of corpses
of the rainbow-coloured butterflies.

◆ ◆ ◆

The Bear

The black walls before my eyes
turned into stones;
the bear broke the day's slate,
which turned at last,
into the moon and stars.

The black bear
strangled in black chains,
carrying the burden of darkness
on its back
limps and staggers,
on the naked roads,
on foams of waves,
in crooked lanes,
in bleak houses—
the black bear
with its sharp shiny teeth.
In its thick dark hair
I have found out
its two eyes like stars;
its colour is like raw smoke,
a shadow without shine,
it stares in front of me,
and pants under the shade of trees,
as froth oozes from its mouth
like black ink.
I caress its forehead.
Its sharp shining long nails
reek of black blood!

Slowly, a bear enters my being!
I transform into the bear—
long teeth grow up,
black hairs cover my body,
I gasp in my bed
like a bear!

◆ ◆ ◆

A Poem

On the rack,
over the old books,
lie many more books—
Nida[1], Waris[2], Afzal[3], Parvez[4] and Saz[5]
Bani[6], Narang[7], Pashi[8], Komal[9] and Firaq[10]—
like trees clinging to each other
in wilderness!

Pale drooping flowers
in the brass-vase on the table;
the Pablo Picasso painting
on the calendar;
a portrait hanging
on the yellow wall,
its colours peeling off
like parched breath;
at a distance, a *kurta* of *khaddar* cloth
hangs on a hanger like a scarecrow!

The phone rings, a call from Minneapolis,
Riaz[11] in deep anxiety,

Translator's Note: Full names of the above-mentioned people are:

[1] Nida Fazli
[2] Waris Alvi
[3] Afzal Ahmad Syed
[4] Salahuddin Parvez
[5] Abdul Ahad Saz
[6] Hari Manchanda 'Bani'
[7] Gopi Chand Narang
[8] Kumar Pashi
[9] Balraj Komal
[10] Raghupat Sahai 'Firaq'
[11] Riaz Latif

What's wrong with the city?
People never before
were so full of apathy?!
What do I tell him.

Corpses of words are scattered all over.
Paper, pen and inkpot,
wait on the table.
A deep silence is scattered in the room.
A fear descends on the bough of the heart!

◆ ◆ ◆

Let the moon and stars remain intact,
Let the bed-chambers remain intact.

Let the fire of life never douse,
Let the cold wind remain intact.

Oh the joy of getting lost again!
Let the wilderness remain intact.

The roof of my house has collapsed,
O Lord! Let the skies remain intact.

Even in the seasons of sorrow, my God!
Let the flowers of patience remain intact.

◆ ◆ ◆

Where have I Kept the Poem?

In the drawers of my desk,
over the table,
on the rack, in the cupboard,
on the book shelf—
                    I have been searching for it for so long,
in frenzy,
through the pages of my old books,
                    in the torn pockets
                    of my *khaddar kurta*,
in my camel-leather bag.
Where have I kept the poem?

Then I ask,
Neruda, Amichai, Rilke;
I just kept it somewhere.
As I search for the poem, I find
the pen, ink and the blank papers.
But the poem
is missing
from the notebook of my heart.

* * *

The Weary Sun

After the full day's journey,
the jaundiced weary sun
takes off its sunlight clothes,
and jumps
from the bare shore
into the waves of the crimson sea.

¤ ¤ ¤

Collage

I have before me,
curtains of varied hues,
windows, doors, rooms—
drawing room, prayer room,
ladies' chambers.
On the walls of the hall,
seals of a tribal girl
        and bamboo drawings.
On different faces, anger,
love songs,
sorrows and miseries, scores of emotions...

I make a collage of them all,
hang it on the peg of my eyes,
and adorn the walls of my heart.

* * *

Who has stolen my beautiful dream, who knows,
Who has inked my heart's land, who knows!

The one who holds me back on the brink of sin,
hides in my own heart, who? Who knows!

He is present in all directions and yet eludes me.
With moon on forehead like sapphire, who? Who knows!

My body is strewn all over with wounds.
Yet the one dwelling in heart survives; who?
Who knows!

Was it the God traversing those green skies!
Who with starry forehead I met last night, who knows!

* * *

O Sea, O Sea

(1)

O Sea, O Sea,
Behind the wakeful eyes,
sets a crimson stone.
O Sea, O Sea,
Moon and stars – all dreams
like the episodes of my heart,
the evening's vivid scenery.
O Sea, O Sea,
Lo! how chuckles the beach!
Who participates in my grief?
A flame kindles in my heart.
O Sea, O Sea!

◆ ◆ ◆

O Sea, O Sea

(2)

O Sea, O Sea,
Oh, the September thirteenth!
Remember my promise to thee?
O Sea, O Sea,
Silent are the tiny ferries.
Tranquil, the shadows of the moon.
Cold is the dark scenery.
O Sea, O Sea,
I couldn't but behold,
I drowned with the flow.
A green word was washed away.
O Sea, O Sea!

* * *

O Sea, O Sea

(3)

O Sea, O Sea,
I see at the shore of the evening,
a caravan of colours setting.
O Sea, O Sea,
Who has shattered
these tiny sand castles?
Tell us, O wild current!
O Sea, O Sea,
I am tired of wandering.
I've been dead for long.
Drown me in your waves!
O Sea, O Sea!

◆ ◆ ◆

O Sea, O Sea

(4)

O Sea, O Sea,
I am restless, you too are silent.
Darkness engulfs scenes after scenes.
O Sea, O Sea,
What use is the moon?
It's all the game of money.
Mere pebbles, my destiny.
O Sea, O Sea,
Pessimism looms all around
Who can read the language of the heart?
Who has such leisure on the earth?
O Sea, O Sea!

* * *

Adorn thy garland
with moments' green flowers.
Release rivers
throughout the night,
on the page of the heart.
The journey is beset
with the scorching sun.
Let her long tresses,
be your shade forever.
Why aspire
for heart's constancy?
Let it be ocean at times,
at times, a desert.
At leisure, even at noon,
you may find moon;
Recite some beautiful couplet
of any ghazal!
No place to sleep
can be found in the forest.
Narrate a nice story,
or even a tale.

◆ ◆ ◆

Surreal Dreams

A moment ago
her breasts glowed
on the silken canvas of her blue bra.
In the dark lanes of navel,
over the green grass
climb the ants of desire;
going up the slopes of breasts,
the footprints of frenzy,
slide into a deep ditch!
Lounging on the couch of lips
the butterflies of lust;
the waves of blood clinging to the moon;
the yellow sun,
drying wet clothes on tall coconut trees;
from the leaf of eye-lashes
descended a scarlet star,
sinking thereafter
in the waters of darkness;
the nude evening,
lying on the sand
was kissing her warm calves;
the colourful fishes of thighs
longing to flee.
My dreams, all flighty!

◆ ◆ ◆

The Kiss

Your kiss
sees,
a river of fire in my chaste body.

Your kiss
hears,
the tumult of waves
flowing in the abysm of navel.

Your kiss
savours in my blue veins,
the sun, the moon and stars.

Your kiss
smells the gentle fragrance,
of flowers chuckling over my body.

Your kiss—
a crooning bird,
on the horizon of my heart.

Your kiss
discovers the universe
within!

⌑ ⌑ ⌑

Memory

(For Sheen Kaaf Nizam)

His memory,
surges in my eyes,
like the waves,
rising on the river bank.

His memory,
stealthily descends
into the blind alley of my breath,
like a name etched on a tree
with a knife.

His memory,
meets me, out of the blue,
just like that,
like an old coin,
as I walk on my way.
I hide it in the pocket
of my heart.

* * *

My courage is like a dying star.
My path is to cross a mirage.

You footsteps lighted every element.
My desolate night-house became fragrant.

A strange tumult prevailed
in the river of heart, after him.
A piece of cloud was my witness.

I did not wake from my sleep lest,
my bond with my dreams be lost!

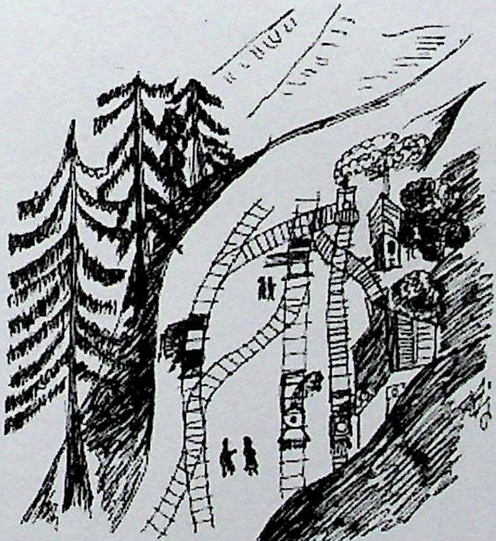
In the night of passion,
I searched through the pages of the universe.
My lost word was nowhere to be found.

◆ ◆ ◆

An Afternoon Painting

A hunting dog
runs across the sky,
its tongue lolling out,
and the fire
fuming from it!

* * *



To the Comb

(For Vidisha)

As I lie on my bed
reading,
she sneaks into my room.
With her gentle fingers,
she combs
my dishevelled hair,
like her doll's.
My weary night
feels sleepy.

* * *

Without any pillar stands my sky,
It's all my illusion, my fantasy.

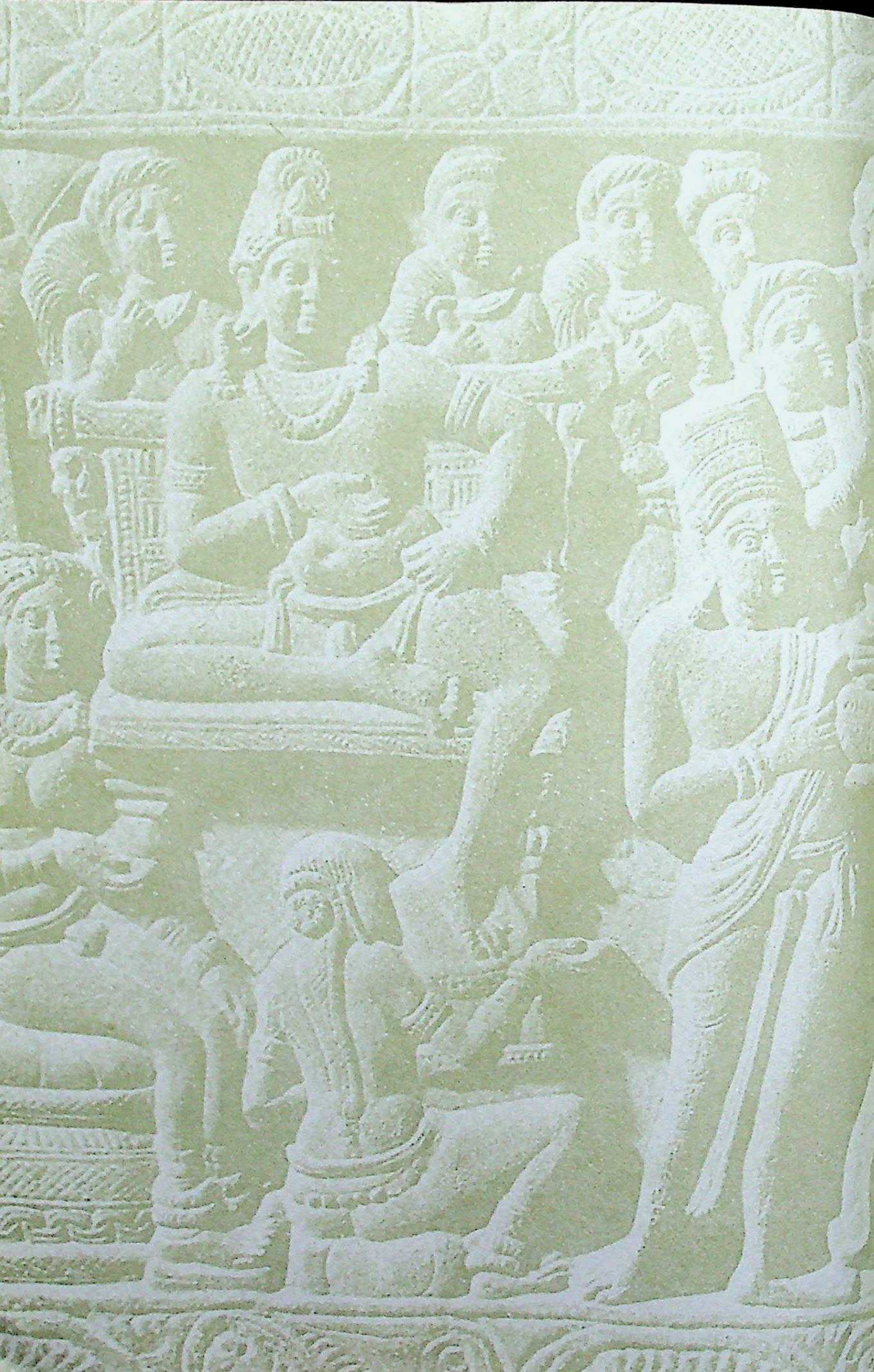
I too will shine one day,
My gaze is fixed on a star, already.

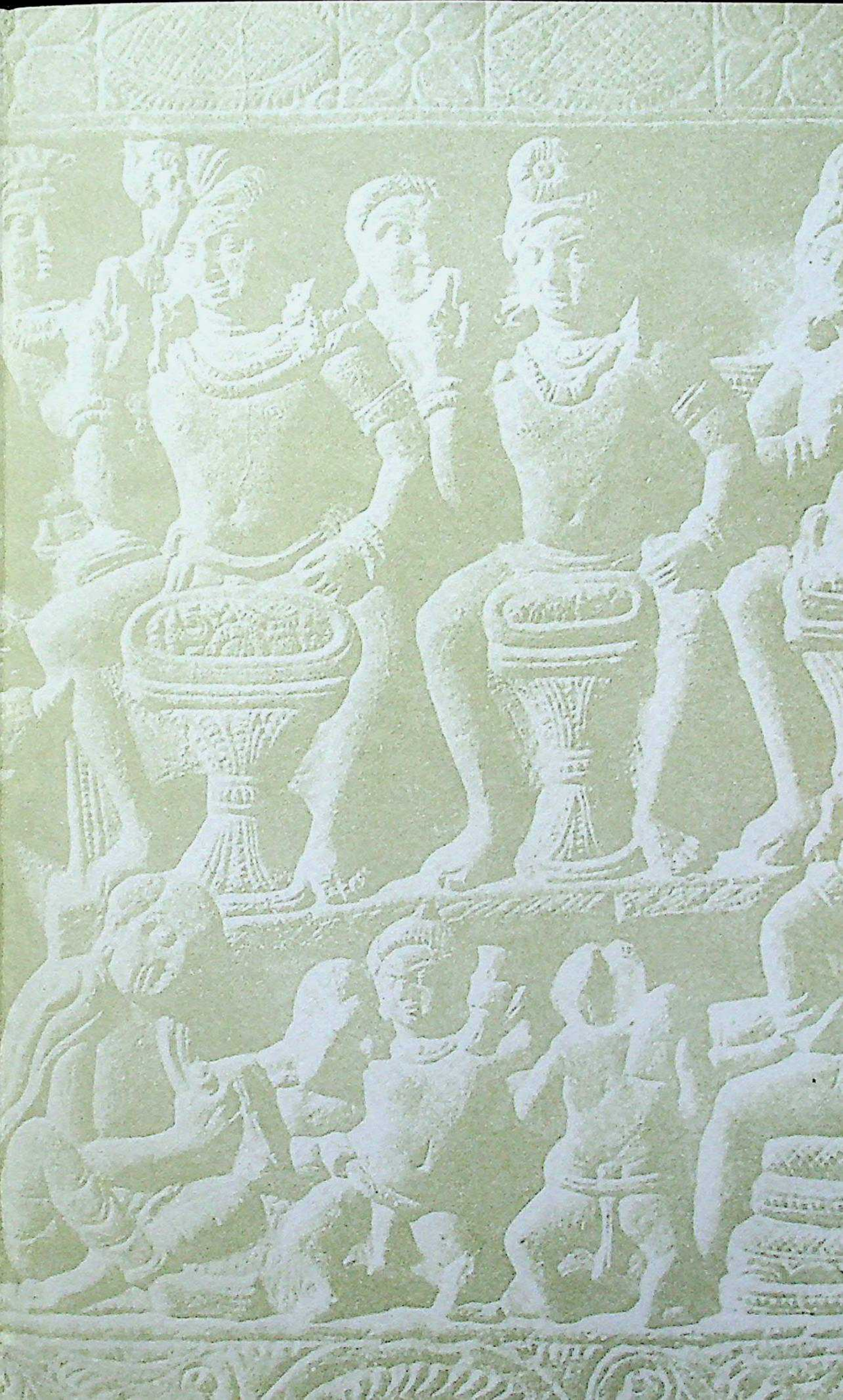
Nothing is in my control yet,
The whole world is my territory.

The wave of time will bury,
My marks on sand, my legacy.

I look for the shadow of flower in words,
This passion is my test, my scrutiny.

* * *





Pencil Aur Doosri Nazmein (2006), the second anthology by Jayant Parmar won the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in 2009. A collection of *nazms* and *ghazals*, the book is unique in its amalgamation of Dalit angst with the aesthetics of Urdu poetry.

Jayant Parmar (b.1954), a bilingual poet, has published extensively in Gujarati and Urdu. His Gujarati poems vocally express his Dalit concerns. But, Urdu, he claims, is his first love. He has written both *nazms* and *ghazals* in Urdu. He published his first anthology in Urdu in 1999 titled *Aur*. Jayant Parmar has been honoured with the Gujarat Urdu Akademi Award (2001), Kumar Pashi Award (2001) and the Sahitya Akademi Award (2009).

Nishat Zaidi is a critic, scholar and translator. She is the author of *Anne Sextom. A Postmodern Feminist Reading* and has translated and edited a number of books including *A Voyage to Modernism: Sir Syed Ahmed Khan* (with Mushirul Hasan). She is currently Professor, Department of English, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi.

साहित्य
SAHITYA
AKADEMI

ISBN 978-81-260-4330-9
9 788126 043309
www.sahitya-akademi.gov.in

₹150